

WEATHER

DRAWER 11

BIRTHPLACE CABIN

71. 2009, 085. 05034

Kentucky Birthplace Cabin

Weather

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

I recently came upon the following record of observations of the New Madrid earthquake in an old journal in my possession of my great-grandfather, William Brown. The observations were made by him at his home three miles north of Hodgenville, Kentucky, and forty six miles directly south of Louisville. This location was 225 miles slightly north of east of New Madrid. He has left numerous records in this journal, some of which have been published, that indicate the accuracy of his observations and records. The notes of the earthquake seem worthy of publication because accurate records of it made at the time are few and unexcited ones very rare.

Mount Gilead Kentucky Earthquake on Sunday night Decr. 15th, 2 of the clock of the night a severe shock of an earth quake was felt. The motion of shaking continued about 15 minutes. About half an hour after this shock was over another was felt less severe, continued only a minute or two. The next day, Monday morning the 16th, a little after sunrise another shock was felt, the tremor continued a few minutes. Two other slight shocks were felt that morning - the next shock was on Sunday about midday not so violent as the first. The weather for some days before had been dull and cloudy. Again on the night of the 30th. instant a shock was felt. Again on Jany (Thursday) 23 1812 at 8 O'clock in the morning another severe shock was felt. The tremor continued for several minutes. When it had stilled another shock was felt which lasted a minute or two. On Monday morning Jany. 27th, a slight shock was felt - on Tuesday evening, 4th Feby. 1812 a slight shock was felt. The trembling of the earth continued for several minutes suppd. 6 or 7 - and a rumbling noise heard. These are the shocks that we have felt at this place. By report hardly a day passes but the trembling of the Earth is more or less felt. In time of the severest shocks to attempt to walk you feel light head and reel about like a drunken man. Again on the night of Thursday, the 6th Feby. about 4 o'clock A.M. a very severe shock was felt which lasted fully 15 minutes with a rumbling noise like distant thunder and three very distinct reports like cannon was heard at the end of it. Again on Friday night the 7th a smart shock at 8 o'clock then about 11 o'clock another less severe. Frequently you may feel a trembling in the Earth when there is no visible appearance of shaking. It has invariably been cloudy weather about the time of the shocks and rains or snow shortly after. Again on the night 20th Feb. about 9 or 10 o'clock 2 slight shocks were felt the last of which continued its tremor for more than 15 minutes. Again on Saturday night about 10 o'clock (22nd) another slight shock. X.

There are many contemporaneous accounts. Fuller republished in Science 2 most of Audubons account in his "Journal". It is written two or three years after the occurrence and is inaccurate; he puts the date a year after it occurred, and the first shock as occurring in the afternoon while he was riding. Bradbury, the British botanist, happened to be at the very centre of the disturbance, on the Mississippi River, and describes it carefully in his "Travels in the Interior of America". Bradbury was a trained scientific observer and, as might be expected, his account is the most valuable. In the American Geologist, 3 Broadhead brings together most or all of the other early accounts that have been published. Of these the accounts of Elizabeth Bryan, of New Madrid taken down four and one half years later by Lorenzo Dow, is the only one that is free from excitement and gives a chronological account of the shocks.

Brown's record of the repeated shocks agrees closely with those of Bradbury and Bryan and is the only one that is equally temperate and detailed.

Bradbury mentions the previous appearance of a comet in the following words: "One of the men attributed it to the comet that had appeared a few months before, which he described as having two horns"

Brown also refers to the comet in the note next preceeding that of the earthquake in his journal as follows:

A comet with a broomy tail appeared about the first week in September 1811 in the northern region of the Heavens. Its course appeared to be coming from the Northeast and making its way to the Southwest. Continued to be visible until about middle of Jany 1812. The last appearance of it was in the So. Western region of the Heavens.

It is evidence of his freedom from superstition that he does not suggest any connection between the comet and the earthquake.

Wm. Allen Pusey.

1 From Wm. Brown's "Journal" PP. 19 and 20, in University of Chicago Library.

2 May 12, 1905, N.S. XX1, No. 541.

3 Vol. 30, August, 1902.

*Mt. Giles was the Hardin Co
(now La Rue) home of William
Brown*

